

## A THEORETICAL INTERLUDE

*Either* they join forces with Russia, and then the toiling masses of the border regions will be emancipated from imperialist oppression;

*Or* they join forces with the Entente, and then the yoke of imperialism is inevitable.

There is no third solution. So-called independence of a so-called independent Georgia, Armenia, Poland, Finland, and so forth, is only an illusion, and conceals the utter dependence of these apologies for states on one imperialist group or another.<sup>7</sup>

Having thus made it clear that revolutionary Russia will resist as counterrevolutionary the separation of border regions from the center, Stalin formulates the program for federal ties and regional autonomy of these regions with Russia:

Soviet autonomy is not a rigid thing fixed once and for all time; it permits the most varied forms and degrees of development. It passes from narrow administrative autonomy (the Volga Germans, the Chuvashes and the Karelians) to a wider, political autonomy (the Bashkirs, the Volga Tatars and the Kirghiz); from wide political autonomy to a still wider form of autonomy (the Ukraine and Turkestan); and finally from the Ukrainian type of autonomy to the supreme form of autonomy—contractual relations (Azerbaijan). This elasticity of Soviet autonomy constitutes one of its prime merits, for this elasticity makes it possible to embrace all the various types of border regions in Russia, which vary greatly in their levels of cultural and economic development.<sup>8</sup>

Thus absorption by the Soviet State, according to Stalin, is not just another annexation of the imperialist-capitalist type. Instead the absorbed regions are promised Soviet autonomy, the highest form of which is *contractual relations*. Azerbaijan is quoted as an example of contractual relations, and we know that Azerbaijan, having been infiltrated by the Communists and conquered

by the Red Army, had concluded a treaty with the Soviet Russian Republic in 1920. Technically speaking, the Republic of Azerbaijan was independent when concluding this treaty. Yet virtually it was already a conquered state and its agreement to conclude a treaty was made under foreign pressure and dictation. Thus, in fact, the Soviet concept of autonomy and independence necessarily blurs a clear distinction between a Soviet-

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77. Italics mine.

<sup>s</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79. This and the preceding quotation are reprinted by permission of International Publishers.